

## NEW PUBLICATIONS.

## A NOVEL AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF AN ENGLISH GAMEKEEPER (JOHN WILKINS, OF STANSTEAD, ESSEX). Edited by Arthur H. Byng and Stephen M. Stephens. Illustrated. 12mo. pp. 441. Macmillan & Co.

We cannot say that the autobiography of John Wilkins is a more interesting book than the "Gamekeeper at Home" of Richard Jefferies; but it is certainly a more realistic one. It is in fact just what it purports to be, namely, a frank and honest chronicle of the life of an English gamekeeper with an experience of sixty years in his profession. A preliminary word, however, is due to gold concerning the editing of the book. The editors appear to have entertained peculiar ideas as to their functions. Their work is seemingly confined to the occasional introduction, sometimes in the text, sometimes in a note, of comments which were intended to be humorous, but which in nearly every instance are simply silly. They appear to be thinking all the time that they are having a "lark" with old Wilkins, and to have no suspicion that there can be any question of taste involved in making fun of the writer whose book they have undertaken to edit. One would say at once that they must be very young and inexperienced, but it is a pity that no one with riper judgment was at hand to give them a little commonsense advice.

John Wilkins himself is inclined to be garrulous, but he is delightfully naive and has good old-fashioned views and principles. The chief charm of his auto biography consists in the fact that introduces the reader to quite a new, or at least quite an unexpected, little world. Nor is it an altogether simple world. The English gamekeeper, it appears, must have a policy; and sometimes he finds it very hard to maintain it consistently. For gentlemen who preserve game may or may not be hunters. If they are, then they preserve foxes as well as pheasants and partridges. But foxes do not preserve game; on the contrary they destroy it whenever they can. The result is that the landlord who wishes to shoot at one time of the year and to hunt at another time imposes upon his gamekeeper an extremely enormous task. He must not kill the foxes; but neither must he let the foxes kill the pheasants. John Wilkins takes much pains to let it be known that he never was a "fox-killer," and he lays himself out to prove that the gamekeeper's policy is to abstain from killing foxes whether his employer be a hunting man or no. The reason for this is that even if he does not hunt he generally allows his servants to be beat up for the local hunt once or twice a year; and if on such occasions blanks were always drawn, the members of the hunt would soon suspect the gamekeeper of being a fox-killer, and that would ruin his standing with hunting men all through the country, and probably much farther.

Of course the gamekeeper's most constant and pressing duty is the prevention of poaching, and the career of John Wilkins has been full of adventure. His theories on poaching are of a kind to surprise most people, for he constantly goes in for treating poachers "with civility"—though he candidly admits that poachers are apt to leave their civility at home when they go out at night. However, it must be acknowledged that Mr. Wilkins's experience of sixty years bears him out. One result of doing his spitting gently was that he made no rancorous friends with his professional enemies. No attack was ever made upon him from revenge. Another strong point in his favor was his practice never to bear needlessly hard upon poachers when he had caught them. They all came to understand that Wilkins on the witness stand could be trusted to tell no more than the truth, and they laid up no grudges against him. Some of his ways were rather peculiar, however, as a custom with him, when he had captured a poacher red-handed, to take the prisoner to his lodge, give him a good supper, a pipe and a glass, and sit up having a "crack" with him. If the man was convicted and sentenced to a term of imprisonment, the keeper would do what he could to help the man's family by sending them rabbits and other provisions. In this way he remained several strict and mischievous poachers, and what is more, put them on his own side for the future.

He writes eratically, often dropping the thread of the story to plunge into discussions about snaring, trapping, etc., or to deliver a lecture upon dogs and their training, or to give good advice to gamekeepers at large, or to dip into his magazine of facts concerning ferrets or rabbits or "flying vermin" or foxes. These digressions are, however, not less interesting than the narrative proper, though the latter is peppered with curious anecdotes and stories of fights with poachers.

The funniest of these is of one of his assistants, a man of immense strength but no courage, named Joslin. An encounter with a gang of poachers brought Joslin on one occasion into a fierce struggle with a powerful fellow. Joslin stood by, unengaged, but simply looking on, and though Wilkins kept calling on him for aid Joslin confined his exertions to shouting in a general way to the banting poachers: "All we want is civility!" which the poachers did not seem to appreciate.

Another time Wilkins was fallen upon by three poachers at once, and beaten into insensibility by his assistants running away and carrying the news that he had been killed. A pleading attribute of the old man is his humane disposition. In a discourse on dog-breeding, for example, he strongly deprecates the use of the whip in training young dogs, and shows how well the work can be done by kindness and patience. So also, in speaking of various methods of trapping and snaring the vermin that destroy game, he urges the employment of strong, sharp, and well-set traps alone, to the end that the poor creatures caught may not be kept lingering in pain. Considering the relative mischief done by hares and rabbits to the crops, he maintains, contrary to the general opinion of farmers, that the destructiveness of the rabbit has been much exaggerated, and that the hare is by far the more mischievous of the two animals.

The autobiography contains recipes enough of various kinds to set up an amateur gamekeeper, and while no doubt these recipes are all good in their way, it must be admitted that some of them are the reverse of savory—especially those which depend upon a basis of dead cat, pig, or hedgehog.

Candor is one of the strong points of John Wilkins. He had a brother-in-law who was a scamp, and he denounces this relative by name as "out-and-out scoundrel," and "imprincipled blackguard," etc., and then clinches the nail by proving these epithets to be deserved. As the wicked brother-in-law went to Australia some forty years ago, and has not been heard of since, however, perhaps he may be considered fair game. Wilkins is somewhat addicted to blowing his own trumpet, extolling his shooting, his skill in dog-butching, snare-setting, trapping, running, and woodcraft generally, but is full of information, and his views sufficiently prove the possession of sound principles and a strong sense of duty. His book indeed is thoroughly manly, fresh and natural, and the writer is far too simple to think of making excuses for lack of literary skill.

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